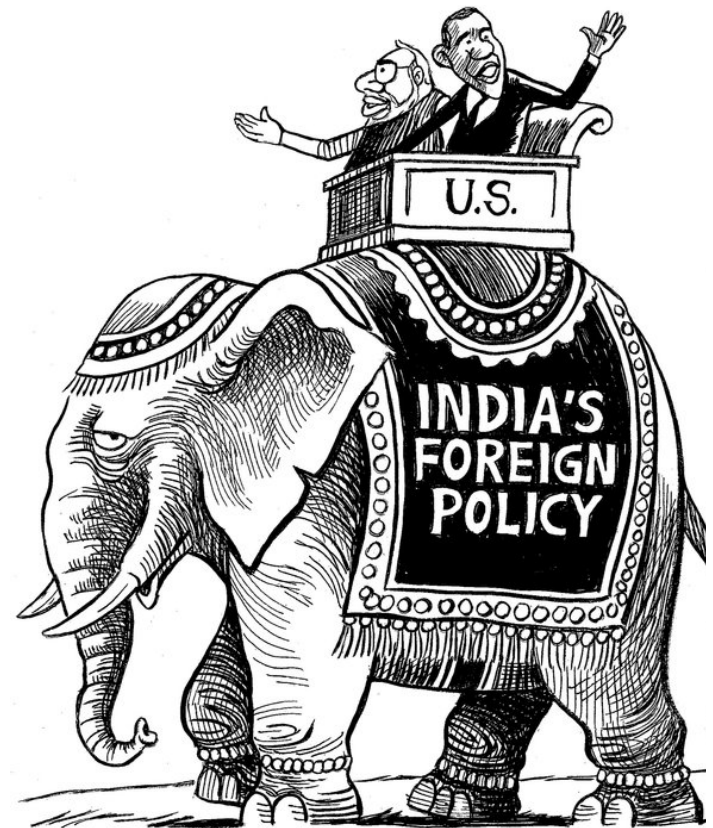


# INDIAN EXPANSIONISM

The growing military, political, and economic alliance with the u.s., particularly since the BJP has been in power, is developing into a dangerous u.s.-'israel'-India Axis, to be used not only against the people of South Asia, but even beyond, as part of the u.s.'s geopolitical strategy in Asia.



***A Great Threat to the Entire  
People of South Asia, Including  
the People of India***

subcontinent as long as it continues to exist. The peoples' movements in the respective countries together with the movements of the nationalities and the revolutionaries must all unite in a common front to target Indian Expansionism and imperialism, particularly that of the u.s.

So the call of the hour is for the revolutionary and nationality movements on the subcontinent to forge greater ties and unite with all other democratic forces to fight the monster of Indian Expansionism.

It is not that the people of these countries are against the Indian people. But the Indian ruling class's policies of dominating, bullying, and ruthless exploitation of these countries have antagonized them. And they see the Indian people backing their own government. But the Indian people gain nothing from this loot—it is the Indian big bourgeoisie, the TNCs, the top politicians/bureaucrats, etc. who gain. And it is these same robber barons that also inhumanly exploit the Indian people. So, the enemy is common—Indian Expansionism tied to u.s. imperialism's geopolitical offensive.

Besides, the Indian military might is used to crush by brute force not only the people's movements in India but in entire South Asia. This is clearly seen in the continuous war threats to Pakistan, Indian troops' infiltration during the formation of Bangladesh, the use of the IPKF against the Tamil fighters of Sri Lanka, covert Indian military assistance to the King of Nepal to crush the Maoists, and continuous Indian pressure on the King of Bhutan for joint military operations in Bhutan against the NE militants. It can be clearly seen that the Indian rulers act as the gendarmes against all people's movements in South Asia.

But being a backward country itself it needs the backing of some imperialist power in its expansionist ambitions. Earlier it was the Soviet imperialists; today it is the u.s. imperialists. The growing military, political, and economic alliance with the u.s., particularly since the BJP has been in power, is developing into a dangerous u.s.-'israel'-India Axis, to be used not only against the people of South Asia, but even beyond, as part of the u.s.'s geopolitical strategy in Asia. No doubt contradictions will be there in the development of this alliance, but the dangers are already apparent.

In this context, just as the ruling classes of South Asia come closer under Indian tutelage, the people of South Asia must forge close alliances to assist each other in their battles and to join in the common fight against Indian Expansionism. **Indian Expansionism, tied to u.s. imperialism's geopolitical offensive, is a dangerous enemy of the entire South Asian people.** There will be no peace on this

# INDIAN EXPANSIONISM

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by  
Arvind

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*only attend if there is progress towards free trade within SAARC in the next few weeks.” They openly threaten that “Vajpayee would travel to Islamabad if there is a worthwhile agreement to sign.”* The reason for Vajpayee agreeing to go is that meanwhile Pakistan has come down from its strong stand on some trade issues. In the fourth round of trade negotiations on SAPTA, in sharp contrast to its earlier approach it made no attempt to obstruct the process; in addition the 78 tariff lines on which concessions were to be given by Pakistan as per the third round, was finally brought into force in May 3. Finally, even on the Draft Treaty Framework for the SAFTA there has been progress—which had been stalled for years. No wonder Vajpayee has decided to grace the occasion to arm-twist more concessions towards the SAFTA.

But this is nothing new. After Musharraf took power in 1999, the SAARC was stalled for 3 years as the Indian rulers refused to sit at the same table with what they called a military dictator. Then, for the Kathmandu 11th Summit of SAARC in January 2002, India did not confirm till the very last moment. Then, on the very day before the opening of the Summit, an official in the Pak embassy at Kathmandu was arrested, in an attempt to derail the procedure. Even recently two meetings of the SAARC Communications Ministers have been cancelled at the last moment due to India’s sabotage. In the first date, fixed for December 20, 2002, India sought a postponement on some technical grounds. Though this was immediately re-fixed for March 7, 2003, it too had to be cancelled due to non-confirmation from India.

It is clear from this: **SAARC will continue, if it serves the Indian ruler’s hegemonistic interests in pushing through the SAFTA (and like policies) or else it will be sabotaged and the Indian expansionists will try the same through arm-twisting the smaller neighbours through bilateral agreements. Having got agreements with three, the next in line of fire is Bangladesh.**

### **People of South Asia, Fight Back Indian Expansionism**

There is an anti-Indian feeling, not only in Pakistan, but all the countries of South Asia—Nepal, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. Why?



militant bases in its country. Like with Nepal, Bhutan too is governed by the humiliating Indo-Bhutan Treaty of Friendship (signed in August 1949), which says the “Government of Bhutan agrees to be guided by the advice of the GOI in regard to its external relations.” A joint press release during the King’s visit to India in September 2003 said “it is important to understand that Bhutan and India had been working very closely together to solve the militant problem over the past few years.” Bhutan has been under enormous pressure to act against the ULFA, NDFB, KLO, and other militants based there. On December 14, 2003, in a joint operation, Bhutan and Indian troops launched a massive attack on the militant bases in the border areas of Bhutan. In the name of attacking these bases the Indian rulers are seeking military intervention in Bhutan to increase its vice-like grip over the country. The King will be made into a mere puppet of the Indian rulers.

Meanwhile India has been robbing Bhutan’s rich natural resources, particularly its hydroelectric power which is being sold at a “friendship price” to India. In the recent visit of the King of Bhutan to India in September 2003 a further MoU was signed for the 870 MW Punatshangchu hydroelectric project. Obviously, the robbery continues, and the “friendship price” is no doubt one-sided.

## SAARC

Set up in 1985, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, has been sought to be used by the Indian rulers as a tool of Indian expansionism. And when it did not get the desired results it has openly sabotaged the body. Indian hegemonic behaviour is most crudely to be seen here. India’s chief aim at the SAARC has been to use it to push through a Free Trade Agreement for the entire region. As others are suspicious of this move and Pakistan openly hostile, India has gone ahead and signed bilateral FTAs with Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Bhutan and continuously stabbed the SAARC in the back.

In fact the 12th Summit is due to be held in Islamabad in January 2004. After a lot of postponements, the Indian rulers, after accepting the date, officials now (September 2003) bluntly state: “Vajpayee will

*(As we go to the press Indian troops have entered Bhutan whose forces have been forced to act as cannon fodder in the Indian rulers’ war against nationality movements of the North East. This amounts to nothing but blatant aggression on a neighbouring small country. The militants had no problems with the Bhutanese government for the past decade, yet the puppet king has allowed in Indian troops to occupy a sovereign country. The Bhutanese have already lost 35 of their personnel, while the militants have lost over 100 in an all-out war. This is nothing but the blatant and crude expansionism of the Indian rulers. The Indian people must demand the immediate withdrawal of all troops from Bhutan and an end to all army operations)*

—Arvind

Christina Rocca, the u.s. Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia, on her recent trip to India stated at a meeting of the CII (Confederation of Indian Industries) on September 12, 2003, “India’s historical, cultural, and social ties with Nepal continue to make it the most important outside influence on events in the country. Working in tandem, our governments can help Nepal defeat the Maoist threat.” Also, to allay Indian fears of being bypassed in Sri Lanka in the “peace talks,” she added “as Sri Lanka’s largest neighbour and trading partner, India plays a critical role in that country’s future.”

This is nothing but open u.s. acknowledgement of India’s expansionist role in the subcontinent, no doubt acting in tandem with the u.s.’s geopolitical strategy in the region. It was said in the context of wooing India, to get in return troops for Iraq. The comprador Indian ruling classes have, of late, not been happy with the u.s. acting independently in the region and giving equal status to Pakistan. They demand an ‘israel’-like status in South Asia and are utilising the u.s.’s problems in Iraq and with its European associates, to strike a better deal with the u.s. for their expansionist role in South Asia.

This article is being written in the backdrop of the forthcoming SAARC Summit to be held in the first week of January 2004. The Indian PM, Vajpayee, after blowing hot and cold, has finally condescended to be present on the occasion. The arm-twisting is to push the countries of the region to go speedily for the SAFTA (South Asia Free Trade Association), or at least a reduction of tariff barriers that will allow the

free flow of goods to the neighbouring countries. Pakistan, particularly remains a major untapped market for India's comprador big bourgeoisie and the India-based TNCs (Transnational Corporations). Besides that is the importance of the oil and gas pipelines to India being negotiated with Iran and the u.s. companies in Afghanistan, which necessarily requires cooperation from Pakistan.

India's comprador big bourgeoisie together with their TNC associates here, promote Indian expansionism in order to capture the markets and sources of raw materials of the whole region. For this, they flex not only economic muscle but also their military might. With India comprising three-fourths of South Asia's land mass and population, domination, bullying, and hegemony over its neighbours comes easily. Not only that, with its goal for a South Asian homogenic market it vehemently opposes the nationality movements of the country, seeks further to undermine what little federal structure exists (witness the attempts to introduce a common VAT—value-added tax—as opposed to the sales tax that exist today, which is the main source of revenue of the States), and demands a powerful Centre asserting its authority over every aspect of the economic, political, and social life of the people of the country and even South Asia. It is for this reason that it promotes English and Hindi at the cost of the regional languages, pushes for an all-India educational system and promotes on a huge scale Hindi films and TV serials at the cost of development of the local cultures.

For these reasons Indian expansionism is not only a grave danger to the people of the neighbouring countries and the nationality movements, it is also a grave danger to the Indian people. Today it is coming packaged with big-nation chauvinism and Hindutva fascism. In the name of fighting terrorism it is not only whipping up hysteria against Pakistan and crushing under its jack-boots the struggling nationalities of the country, but also being used to crush even the smallest dissent of the Indian people.

Indian expansionism is nothing but the hegemony of India's comprador big bourgeoisie and the transnational corporations operating in the country, being promoted as "*the National Interest*." They are two sides

of Afghanistan, Pakistan holds the key to the warm water ports of the Indian Ocean for the massive oil and gas deposits of Central Asia. In addition, good relations between India and Pakistan are essential for the development of these deposits, as Pakistan provides the transit route while India the huge market. That is why the u.s. oil majors are interested in settling the Indo-Pak dispute soon. Not only the u.s., but Pakistan's arch-enemy, Russia is building bridges due to its interests in profits from oil and gas deposits. Gazprom, the Russian oil giant, came up with plans to build a natural gas pipeline from Iran to India, via Pakistan coastal waters. Gazprom is also interested in a stake in the u.s. proposal to build a natural gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to Pakistan via Afghanistan.

Besides, Indian compradors are eyeing the Pakistani market where trade with it stood at a mere \$250 million last year. It has the potential to increase ten-fold if relations are normalized, with Indian (i.e. comprador + TNC) goods swamping that market. At present, many Indian goods to Pakistan flow to it through Dubai.

Today it is Pakistan that is chiefly resisting the FTA and acting as a major stumbling block to the Indian comprador and TNCs' ambitions in the subcontinent—to create a homogenous market in entire South Asia, with India as the fulcrum. Indian military occupation of Kashmir, against the wishes of the local populace, has facilitated Pakistani assertion, with the latter playing the Kashmir card to counter the Indian military might. To cow down this Pakistani assertion the Indian rulers are itching for a war, but are unprepared to take the step without an OK from their u.s. masters. At present a war with Pakistan can complicate matters for the u.s. in Afghanistan and even Central Asia, let alone Pakistan. But, if ever the mullahs were to take over Pakistan, at the mere click of the finger the Indian hordes would be over the border, egged on by the u.s.

## **Bhutan**

Though Bhutan has been one of the most faithfuls to India, afraid that it will be Sikkimised, it has, as yet, refused joint military action against



trade to his country and has even called for a sub-regional agreement between South India and Sri Lanka as a common market; speaking even of building a bridge over the sea to link the two countries. In fact in his recent visit to India in mid-October 2003 (the third since coming to power in December 2003) he signed away even more of Sri Lanka's freedom to the Indian rulers. The FTA was sought to be extended to free flow of investments and other economic facilities, grounds were laid for the conclusion of the "*defence cooperation agreement*" and even an agreement was signed for "*greater collaboration between the police forces of the two countries.*" These would lead to an even greater flood of Indian take-over of the Sri Lankan economy and control over its state machinery. The two countries are on the verge of signing the CEPA (Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement); and for the first time since the IPKF fiasco, top military officials have been visiting Sri Lanka.

## Pakistan

In open defiance of the 1960 Indus Water Treaty India continues work on the Baglihar dam being built on the Chenab river. Though Pakistan has raised serious objections these have been ignored from the Indian side.

The one major thorn in India's expansionist ambitions is Pakistan, which is refusing to bow down before Indian ruling-class dictates. In the post-9/11 scenario where India's rulers have gone deep into the u.s. embrace, the only return that they demand is for acceptance to be the primary stooge of the u.s. in the region—they are unprepared to share that 'importance' with Pakistan. But, with the u.s.'s strategic interests in Afghanistan at stake, the u.s. is unable to confer that status as yet to its Indian lap-dogs. So, while the Indian ruler's anti-Pak noise gets shriller and shriller as being a main source of terrorism, etc. the u.s. as yet cannot afford to sacrifice such a faithful lackey as Musharraf, particularly when the Muslim world is up-in-arms against the u.s.

Besides, there is as expected an economic factor for the imperialists to push friendly relations between the two countries. After the capture

of the same coin, demanding an all-India and all-South Asia market. A good example of this is to be seen in the massive entry of TNCs (and to a lesser extent compradors) into the car industry in India. In the year ending March 2003 automobile exports jumped 65% over the previous year, with over 3 lakh (300,000) vehicles being sold outside the country—a large part of which went to the neighbouring countries of South Asia. No wonder it is the Indian ruling classes and imperialists that are the most vociferous pushers of the SAFTA (South Asian Free Trade Association). SAARC was to be the main instrument through which to pass it.

An example of the crude expansionist policies of the Indian rulers was best summed up at a seminar held in Delhi a few years back. Here, the then External Affairs Minister, Yeshwant Sinha, said, "*India was ready with a FTA from tomorrow.*" He was for a free flow of investment and services and wanted South Asia to act as trading bloc. He went so far as to state that he favoured a South Asian Union "*with not only economic but political dimensions.*"

It is with this outlook that Indian rulers seek to have puppet regimes in all the countries of South Asia. And if that is not forthcoming, use any and every pretext to de-stabilise those regimes that are not subservient to Indian interests. It has gone to the extent of utilising armed revolts to further its interests and even sending troops to these countries. In 1971 it sought to hijack the Bangladesh movement through covert military operations and in the 1980s sent the IPKF (Indian Peace Keeping Force) to Sri Lanka to suppress the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam). RAW (India's secretive service agents prowl the entire subcontinent. This fact is hidden from the people of the region by a hysteric clamour against the ISI. These highly secretive operatives interfere in the internal affairs of other countries. A recent example was the attempt on the life of a top ULFA (United Liberation Front of Asom) leader in Bangladesh. It was propagated as a shoot-out between rival factions, when in fact it was a clear-cut RAW operation.

**India's expansionist policies with its South Asian neighbours is clear: seek to establish puppet regimes in these countries, or else**

use threats and coercion to make them bow to the dictates of the Indian rulers. For the present, it has somewhat successfully been able to brow-beat the present regimes of Sri Lanka and Nepal (the King) to toe India's expansionist policies, utilising their desperation for 'aid' against the powerful armed insurgencies. With the Khalida government in Bangladesh it has been adopting a policy of threats and dadagiri, utilising the fact that Bangladesh is dependent on India for 80% of its water to arm-twist it into servility. And as far as Pakistan goes, it sees it as a potential rival in South Asia due to its close ties with the u.s., and so seeks to encircle it through high-level diplomatic lobbying with the u.s. and threats of war and outright aggression. Finally, SAARC is used as the forum to push economic domination of the region by India's comprador big bourgeoisie and of India-based TNCs, through the pushing of a Free Trade Agreement—if not able to get their way on this the Indian rulers openly sabotage the SAARC.

Now let us look at the nature of the Indian rulers dealings with most of its neighbours in recent years.

## Nepal

India, together with the u.s., has been involved in covert operations in Nepal in a big way to crush by brute force the ongoing People's War in that country. India has, over the passed couple of years, provided Nepal with military hardware, training, logistics, and technical support worth Rs. 200 crores. In addition, in April last year India agreed to grant Nepal assistance of Rs. 84 crores for setting up the East-West Optical Fibre Cable Network, stretching a huge distance of 1,000 kms, from Bhadrapur in the East to Nepalgunj in the West, covering 81 cities and towns. This would facilitate the counter-insurgency operations going on in this Maoist-dominated belt. In April 2003 the new Chief of Army Staff, General N.C. Vij paid a high-level visit to Nepal. In the midst of the peace talks he pushed for a hard line against the Maoists promising further military aid of Rs. 100 crores. During this visit the Army Chief met with the then Prime Minister, Lokendra Bahadur Chand, the King

get the Bangladesh government to allow gas exports to India. It plans a major \$1.2 billion project to lay a 1,363 kms pipeline to carry gas to the HBJ pipeline near Delhi. Bangladesh has known gas reserves of 16 trillion cubic feet and another 32T cu ft of 'undisclosed reserves.' This can give windfall profits to Unocal and huge supplies to India if Bangladesh gives the OK. Bangladesh is hesitant due to India's big-brotherly attitude on all issues. Bangladesh is also not allowing transit to its ports of good from the North East.

## Sri Lanka

Devastated by a continuous decade long war the Indian rulers have got the weak governments of Sri Lanka to bow before their dictates. Over three years back they have signed a Free Trade Agreement; and in early September 2003, for the first time since the IPKF fled the country in 1990, a high-level military delegation has gone to Sri Lanka to train the country's armed forces. The military delegation had representatives from all the three forces—the army, navy, and air force. This high-level military delegation in Sri Lanka, at a time when the talks with the LTTE have been in a state of confusion, amounts to an open threat to the Tigers to fall in line, and a direct interference in the internal affairs of Sri Lanka.

The so-called FTA with Sri Lanka has all the cunning and one-sidedness as was evinced in dealings with Bangladesh. The FTA, which came into force on March 31, 2000, supposedly gave Sri Lanka eight years to reduce duty to zero while India was given three. But in fact this made little difference to India since Sri Lanka had already reduced duties to zero on all items of interest to India. So, even with the FTA, Sri Lanka could export only Rs. 308 crore worth of goods to India in the year 2001–02, while Indian exports to Sri Lanka in the same year were well over Rs. 3,000 crores. The trade imbalance is still 5:1 against Sri Lanka. What is more, after the signing of the FTA, Indian investments in Sri Lanka worth \$1 billion have already been made or are in the offing.

In spite of this distortion, the Sri Lanka Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, has been waxing eloquent of the advantages of free



India illegally, and these posed a serious threat to the country's internal security, and that they should therefore be immediately located and deported. (It must not be forgotten that the GOI itself has settled lakhs of Hindu Bangladeshis in central India after the 1971 war.) Simultaneously, by February 2003 the Indo-Bangladesh border reached a flashpoint, when talks between the BSF and the BDR broke-down over the 213 gypsies being pushed over the border by the BSF and the BDR refusing to accept them. In just the three months of January to March 2003 the BSF had tried at least 57 times to push some 5,000 people into Bangladesh, heightening tensions along the border. To aggravate matters, in its budget the GOI massively hiked up the allocation for building a fence along the Bangladesh border from Rs. 75 crores to Rs. 200 crores.

Besides, as far as trade relations between the two countries go India's big-brother attitude has come out crudely. For years Bangladesh has been asking for a cut in import duty on 191 major items to India to cut down the continuously burgeoning trade imbalance between the two countries. India, after three years of hard bargaining, finally granted duty-free access to 40 items from Bangladesh; but the items for which it was granted were irrelevant to Bangladesh's exports and so had no impact on the trade gap. It did not include any of the principal items like jute, footwear, and ready-made garments. In addition, India made no concessions on the non-tariff barriers. On the contrary Sinha threatened that any further 'liberalisation' would be possible if Bangladesh signed the FTA. Apparently Bangladesh's trade gap with India has sky-rocketed from \$150 million in 1990 to \$1 billion in 2001. Besides, Indian goods now flood the Bangladeshi markets with exports from India having grown from \$200 million in the early 1990s to a massive \$3 billion today. Not only that, while Bangladesh recognizes the ISI certification of commodities put by India, India refuses to recognize the certificate of the Bangladesh Standard Tech. Institute (BSTI).

All such methods make the Bangladeshis highly suspicious of the GOI's intentions. The u.s. oil giant, Unocal, too has been exerting much pressure to break trade barriers between the two countries, to

Gyanendra, and senior army officials. Not only that, he was conferred with the title of Honorary General of the Royal Nepalese Army.

In mid-April this year the u.s. signed a memorandum of Intent for its anti-terrorism assistance programme with Nepal. The u.s. has announced military assistance of \$17 million (Rs. 315 crores), including the supply of M-16 rifles and training for the RNA. This is in addition to the \$38 million given to Nepal last year (the highest ever in a single year) as part of an economic package to help diffuse the revolt. u.s. military officers are now continuously present in the country.

As is the normal rule, India utilises problems faced by local governments to push their agenda of further domination. This will be seen in all neighbouring countries, particularly Nepal, which is land-locked by India. This was even attempted during the 1990 revolt against the monarchy. In what has now been revealed in Avtar Singh Bhasin's voluminous *Documents on Nepal's Relations with India and China*, he has disclosed that the so-called soft Gujral Doctrine was a fake, and a subterfuge for hardcore expansionist policies. He says the then External Affairs Minister, Inder Kumar Gujral, tried to palm off a Treaty to Nepal on March 31, 1990, which was humiliating and domineering. He adds: "*Events moved fast (thereafter) and the emergence of a new democratic order in Nepal deservedly dealt the draft a death blow. The Indian draft smacked of neo-colonialism as it sought to bind Nepal to an unequal relation more tightly than even the 1950 treaty had envisaged. Apart from affirming the 1950 Treaty, the draft sought to recreate a defence arrangement of a binding nature and sought to obtain for India monopoly control on Nepal's natural resources thus closing all options for Nepal once and for all.*" So much for the much hyped 'soft' Gujral doctrine of India's relations with its neighbours!

Even on this occasion the Indian rulers have sought to utilise the situation to squeeze economic concessions out of the Nepalese government. First, they tried to impose a licensing system and thereby control the movement of trucks across the Indo-Nepal border. Second, the dry port that Nepal had built at Sisiriya lay idle after completion, because the Indo-Nepal rail talks to extend rail services to it, continued to be sabotaged by the Indian side. Besides, after a new trade treaty

was signed on March 2, 2002, India virtually stopped the surge of Nepali exports to India, even though these account for a mere 1% of India's imports. The new Treaty was bulldozed onto Nepal, and Brajesh Mishra, who negotiated the Treaty, warned that henceforth trade concessions could only be given on a reciprocal basis.

## Bangladesh

The recent meeting of the JRC (Indo-Bangladesh Joint Rivers Commission) on October 1, 2003 is an example to the extent to which the Indian rulers are willing to go in their bullying and dadagiri of Bangladesh. Bangladesh had requested that India's river-linking plan be put on the agenda for discussion. India outright refused to even discuss the issue, though the project has the potentiality to completely destroy Bangladesh. Bangladesh was fearful that it would yet again be faced with a *fait accompli* as happened with the Farakka Barrage on the Ganga, which affected water supply to one-third of Bangladesh without any discussion whatsoever. It was only after much haggling that India allowed the topic to be put in the signed minutes. Though India argued that the scheme was yet to be finalized (and so need not be discussed), a few days prior to the JRC meet, the Central Minister in charge of the river-linking scheme, Suresh Prabhu (a Shiv Sainik), gave a long interview to the *Economic Times* outlining its details and issuing open threats to Bangladesh if it dared raise the issue. He stated, in fact, that two links involving UP, MP, and Rajasthan would begin as quickly as possible. He ended the interview threatening that *"our objective is to do what is in our best interests...without being unfair to Bangladesh. But if they still object then it is not the right thing for them to do."* Finally, issuing an open threat to cut water to Bangladesh he said, *"anyway, the per capita availability of water in Bangladesh is 12 times higher than in India."* So panic-stricken is Bangladesh with these threats that it has spoken to international donors not to lend money for this project without consulting them. In addition, when the Khalida government spoke of reviewing the unequal water-sharing treaty of 1996, India threatened that if it dared to do that, it would consider drastically reducing Bangladesh's share of all water supplied. Under such threats, the 1996 agreement was not raised at the JRC meet!

No sooner had the Khaleda Zia Party come to power in the last elections two years back the Indian press and government went hysterical against some so-called atrocities on Hindus in Bangladesh. Since then, the number of border clashes provoked by the BSF has seen a massive leap resulting in the ever-growing number of Bangladeshi casualties. While the number of Bangladeshis killed by the BSF was 11 in 1997, 23 in 1998, 25 in 2000, and 69 in 2001; it was 109 last year (including 8 Bangladeshi Rifles personnel) with another 54 injured.

In August 2002 Yeshwant Sinha went to Bangladesh in an attempt to brow-beat that government to accept a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) along the lines drawn up with Sri Lanka; and bow to India's demands to flush out the NE militants. This was crucial to Indian comprador interests as Bangladesh is the third-largest importer of Indian manufactured products. In addition the compradors have their sights on the NE for its immense natural resources. Having failed in his attempt, a systematically orchestrated campaign began in the country of threats and abuse at Bangladesh.

Hardly had he returned back, when on November 7, 2002, the Deputy Prime Minister, Advani, voiced serious concern over what he termed was the growing activities of the ISI and Al-Qaeda in Bangladesh after the change of Government. He also alleged that the Bangladesh government was lending covert support to the NE militants. On Nov. 10 the Indian High Commissioner in Dhaka took the unusual step of making a statement against the Bangladesh government's supposed support to the 'insurgents.' On Nov. 27 the External Affairs Minister informed the Lok Sabha that the Pak. Mission in Dhaka has become the nerve center of the ISI's activities in encouraging terrorism against India and that some Al-Qaeda operatives had taken shelter in Bangladesh. On Nov. 29 George Fernandes, at a press meet in Bangalore, said that India was in possession of evidence to buttress all these charges.

Then, on January 26, came Advani's most provocative bombshell! While addressing a gathering of State DIGs of police and State Chief Secretaries, he claimed that 1.5 crore Bangladeshis were staying in